

## **DAMAGE ASSESSMENT AND EMERGENCY STATUS REPORT # 1**

**Saturday, May 26, 2012**

### **SITUATION OVERVIEW:**

On May 21, a wildfire was spotted in the Seney National Wildlife Refuge, in Schoolcraft County. It is believed that this fire had started on May 20, as a result of lightning. Although this "Pine Creek Fire" has been contained within the Refuge area, it required the commitment of various personnel and resources. As the Pine Creek Fire was being dealt with, a different fire started up in neighboring Luce County on May 23, at about 4:40 p.m. This new fire was called the "Duck Lake Fire," and was also believed to be caused by lightning. The Duck Lake Fire proved to be much more dangerous, and required many additional resources to address. Strong winds and dry conditions helped to spread the fire to the north, and then to the northeast, causing about 100 structures (of all types) to be destroyed, and many more to be threatened. The area includes jack pine forest, which is particularly vulnerable to the ignition and spread of wildfires.

By the morning hours of May 25, it was estimated that the Duck Lake Fire had encompassed at least 17,000 acres of land, while the Pine Creek Fire had stopped spreading within its own area of approximately 3220 acres. At 8:00 a.m., the State Emergency Operations Center was partially activated in Lansing, to assist with monitoring, communication, and agency coordination activities to address these fires.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency was notified about the situation, and numerous State government departments became involved in emergency response and coordination activities. Governor Snyder declared the existence of a State of Disaster within Luce and Schoolcraft Counties. Some residents in the fire-affected areas of Luce County have evacuated. Some Luce County roads have been partially closed, and the Tahquamenon Falls Park areas have also been closed down, because of problems with heavy smoke from the Duck Lake Fire. Additional firefighting resources are being provided to the area by various agencies. By the morning of May 26, the Duck Lake Fire had expanded to an area of 21,100 acres.

A toll free hotline has been established for the public to obtain the most recent status updates on this situation, at 1-855-440-6424.

### **SUMMARY OF STATE RESPONSE ACTIONS:**

To date, state agencies and involved nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have taken the following significant actions to prepare for, mitigate, respond to and recover from this wildfire disaster:

#### **MSP/EMHSD:**

Personnel from MSP/EMHSD had been monitoring the wildfire response activities, both from its District Office in Marquette County and from its main offices in Lansing. Because of the escalation in the size of the Duck Lake Fire during the evening of May 24 and the early morning hours of May 25, the State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC) was partially activated at 8 a.m. on May 25. It hosted briefing sessions at 8:30 a.m., 1:00 p.m., and 5:00 p.m. on May 25, and at 8:30 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. on May 26 (with more sessions scheduled throughout the long Memorial Day holiday weekend).

SEOC personnel notified the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) about the wildfire situation, and began processing paperwork to prepare for a gubernatorial disaster declaration, as well as an application for a Fire Management Assistance Grant from FEMA. An initial application for this grant was submitted on May 25, but was denied by FEMA. (As additional damages and costs from the disaster are assessed, the SEOC will consider amendments to the initial application.)

#### **Executive Office (Governor):**

Governor Richard Snyder issued a proclamation at 5:10 p.m. on May 25, declaring that a **state of disaster** exists in Luce and Schoolcraft Counties. The proclamation also authorized evacuations to occur, for persons who may be in harm's way due to actual or impending fire danger, as emergency conditions may require within

the disaster area. Thirdly, the proclamation placed a ban upon outdoor burning within forest areas, and adjacent to forest areas, within 49 counties in the Upper Peninsula and the Northern Lower Peninsula. (A map of these counties appears at <http://www.dnr.state.mi.us/burnpermits/> ). Lastly, the proclamation bans the sale and use of fireworks in the area affected by the wildfire.

At 5:20 p.m. on May 25, Governor Snyder issued Executive Order 2012-8, which activated the Michigan National Guard in order to assist with disaster response activities.

**Department of Agriculture and Rural Development:**

A representative of MDARD was present in the SEOC on May 25, to coordinate as needed with other agencies for disaster response and recovery. At this time, no specific actions have been proposed for the department.

**Department of Community Health:**

A representative has been in regular contact with the SEOC and has coordinated with the many agencies involved in the response to this disaster.

**Department of Corrections:**

The department has offered bedding, mattresses, pillows, towels, and similar resources for about 100 persons, if needed by the nearby American Red Cross shelter (the American Red Cross is described below). Assistance was also offered with food preparation for fire responders. The Warden from the Newberry Correctional Facility visited the American Red Cross shelter in Newberry and provided contact information to that shelter, along with these offers. Although they are coordinating directly with the Newberry ARC shelter, requests for these resources should be made through the SEOC, to ensure coordination with all other agencies and avoid any duplication of requests.

**Department of Environmental Quality:**

The department has been represented in the SEOC, and in regular contact and coordination with the many agencies involved in the response to this disaster.

**Department of Human Services:**

A representative was present in the SEOC on May 25, and reported good coordination with local human services directors within the affected counties. There did not yet appear to be specific human service requests made by emergency management.

**Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs:**

The department coordinated with MSP GIS staff in the SEOC, providing various information and maps of utility services in the disaster area.

**Department of Military and Veteran Affairs:**

The Michigan National Guard was activated by Governor Snyder's Executive Order 2012-8, at 5:10 p.m. on May 25. They will be providing four UH-60 Blackhawk aircraft with crews, ground support, fuel support, and Bambi Buckets, to assist with Duck Lake Fire operations. An estimated 40 personnel will be supporting the aircraft and ground operations (10-12 per aircraft). These assets were provided after a request for them had been made by the MDNR (see below). Four additional Blackhawk aircraft could eventually be added to this assistance, if necessary.

**Department of Natural Resources:**

It was an MDNR plane that had initially spotted the Pine Creek Fire on May 21, and by May 24 this fire was reported to be 65% contained, and limited to the area of the Seney National Wildlife Refuge. As the Duck Lake Fire developed, the MDNR put an Incident Management Team in place in Newberry on the evening of May 24. Observations on May 25 had indicated that the Pine Creek Fire had stopped growing. The MDNR has produced and distributed numerous maps and reports among the coordinated response agencies. The department also requested that the Michigan National Guard provide various assets to assist with fire response activities.

The Tahquamenon Falls Park (Upper and Lower) was closed, because of the smoke drifting over from Luce County. More than 100 arriving campers were notified of this closure, and had their park reservations refunded

as a result. The Tahquamenon Falls viewing areas are also closed off. Reservations will not be available at the Rivermouth Campground, either, until June.

Evacuations from Luce County have been covering a widening area, as the Duck Lake Fire has spread. The west side of Chippewa County has been put on alert about the potential for an eventual evacuation there, as well.

The MDNR coordinated with Verizon Wireless (see entry below) about the need to improve communications coverage across the disaster area. These coordination efforts were successful in improving cell phone coverage.

The MDNR established Incident Management Plans, with a stated objective on May 25 to keep the fire contained to the north of M-123 and west of County Road 500, as well as providing protection for structures in the area. The fire was expected to spread at a rate of 1.5 miles per hour, so spotting has been taking place one-half mile ahead of the fire. At the current time, new fire starts were expected to result from this event.

Due to the existence of simultaneous wildfire events in Michigan, additional resources were requested from other agencies. Fire suppression aircraft were ordered, and two CL-215 water bombers, one Type 1 helicopter, and an Air Attack module traveled to the scene in Luce County. Various vehicles and crews are also due to arrive by the early afternoon on May 27. The Wisconsin DNR responded to the MDNR request by sending four fire engines, three Division Supervisors, and three tractor plows. (A helicopter, two planes, five marshmasters, four wetland fire engines, a 20 person team from Illinois, one skidder, and seven volunteer fire departments were being used to combat the Pine Creek Fire.)

On May 26, at 1 p.m., MDNR held a press conference, which served about 20 attendees, including multiple radio and television stations from the area. The conference provided information and answered questions from the public and the media. This conference was held at the MDNR office in Newberry.

The public may obtain updated information on the wildfire disaster by accessing MDNR websites and social media. These include Facebook, Twitter, and [www.michigan.gov/dnr](http://www.michigan.gov/dnr). A public meeting is scheduled to take place on May 27, at 2 p.m. It will occur at the courthouse in Newberry, hosted by the MDNR to provide information to citizens.

#### **Department of State Police:**

State Police units were in the field, coordinating with MDNR, local fire units, and other responders. MSP Department resources currently assigned include three troopers and one sergeant from the Sault Ste. Marie Post working eight hour night shifts. (These personnel are relieving the Sheriff's Department and MDNR officers for the night shifts.) In addition, the MSP is also maintaining a two person night car in both Luce and Chippewa counties. These personnel have been involved in assisting with evacuations, manning traffic points, and patrolling in the fire affected area.

#### **State Fire Marshal:**

A representative has been in regular contact with the SEOC and has coordinated with the many agencies involved in the response to this disaster.

#### **Department of Technology, Management, and Budget:**

The department coordinated with Verizon Wireless (see entry below) in working to improve communications coverage in the disaster area.

#### **Department of Transportation:**

MDOT deployed portable message boards to the Upper Peninsula, to help inform and divert traffic away from the fire area. Road closures were in effect for parts of County Road 500 and County Road 414, in Luce County. Travelers on M-123 were advised to use caution, because of problems with smoke from the wildfires. Persons were advised not to travel into the wildfire area, and certain areas to its east, because of problems with smoke and traffic congestion. The MDOT advisory covered the area of M-123 that stretches from south of Paradise, across to the Murphy Creek area just north of Newberry. Heavy smoke from the Duck Lake Fire was

reducing visibility in this area. MDOT posted changeable message signs to warn motorists of these conditions. Preparations were also made for the possibility of additional road closures, although these were not expected to be needed.

#### **The American Red Cross (ARC):**

The American Red Cross (ARC) set up a shelter at Newberry, to accommodate disaster-affected persons who may have need. The ARC has also partnered with the Newberry "Pet Pals" organization, to accommodate the needs of persons who have pets that may also need sheltering. Although no residents have yet stayed overnight at the Newberry ARC shelter, at least 250 persons have stopped at the shelter so far, for food, water, and information. The shelter provides functional needs support services and has mental health workers and disaster health services personnel available. Two additional shelters are being arranged for in the Eastern Upper Peninsula, to be placed "on stand-by" if they are needed.

The West Michigan ARC office in Muskegon has stated that they have personnel and radio equipment on stand-by, ready to contribute to the disaster response efforts if it is needed.

#### **The LMAS District Health Department:**

The LMAS District Health Department (LMAS stands for Luce, Mackinac, Alger, and Schoolcraft Counties) released a public service announcement called "Wildfire Smoke and Your Health." A shorter version of this announcement was issued to area radio and television stations. The announcement described how wildfire smoke can cause coughing, a scratchy throat, irritated sinuses, shortness of breath, chest pain, headaches, stinging eyes, runny noses, asthma problems, fatigue, and other symptoms. Persons with heart or lung disease are particularly susceptible to these effects, as are older adults and children. Persons in general are advised to limit their exposure to this smoke as much as possible.

#### **Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service (RACES):**

The RACES coordinator for the Upper Peninsula helped use this network to bolster communications throughout the affected area, in coordination with the American Red Cross and its shelter at Newberry. Luce County ARES/RACES activated and has coordinated with the ARC. Communications support from the Northern Lower Peninsula has also been confirmed as available, although it probably won't be needed.

#### **Verizon Wireless:**

The Verizon Wireless phone company agreed to help expand cell phone communications capabilities in the area, by adding an additional channel to the Paradise transmission tower and to their Newberry site, and boosting power to the Newberry and Paradise facilities. There had initially been problems with cell phone coverage in the disaster area, and these actions have resulted in a coverage increase of about 10 to 15 percent. The wireless traffic had nearly doubled across those improved sites within the space of only about a day.

### **DAMAGE AND IMPACT SUMMARIES FOR LOCAL JURISDICTIONS:**

#### **Chippewa County:**

The Chippewa County Emergency Management Office has been coordinating with other agencies, and helping to share important information with the public. General citizens have been advised about local road closures and advised to stay out of the area because of the fires, smoke, and problems with traffic congestion. The Tahquamenon Falls Park (in both Chippewa and Luce Counties) has been closed. The Tahquamenon Falls viewing areas are also closed off. Reservations will not be available at the Rivermouth Campground, either, until June. Heavy smoke has been reported in the Village of Paradise, drifting across from the Luce County wildfires. This smoke had also generated some rumors about an additional fire at Racoon, but this report was determined merely to stem from a misinterpretation of the drifting smoke from Luce County. As of about 5 p.m. on May 26, the fire was still reported to be about 2 or 3 miles distant from the Chippewa County line.

Evacuations from Luce County have been covering a widening area, as the Duck Lake Fire has spread. The west side of Chippewa County has been put on alert about the potential for an eventual evacuation there, as well.

**Luce County:**

The Mutual Aid Box Alarm System (MABAS) has been monitoring the situation, and coordination has already taken place among various fire and police agencies. Residents were evacuated from the Pine Lake area, where the Duck Lake Fire had spread and created a very dangerous situation. County Road 500 has been partially closed (where it leads directly into the fire area), and County Road 414 has also been partially closed (where it meets County Road 410). Evacuations from Luce County have been covering a widening area, as the Duck Lake Fire has spread. More than 70 structures are threatened by the fires, and about 100 structures (of different types) have been lost so far.

On May 26, at 1 p.m., MDNR held a press conference, which served about 20 attendees, including multiple radio and television stations from the area. The conference provided information and answered questions from the public and the media. This conference was held at the MDNR office in Newberry.

A public meeting is scheduled to take place on May 27, at 2 p.m. It will occur at the courthouse in Newberry, hosted by the MDNR to provide information to citizens.

**Schoolcraft County:**

The Pine Creek Fire continues to burn, and has affected about 3220 acres in the Seney National Wildlife Refuge area, but is confined to that area and has stopped expanding. The fire has not affected Highway 28, or any built structures, and is being contained by firefighters.

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:****U.S. Army Corps of Engineers:**

Joe Jarvis of the U.S.A.C.E. reported that their Soo Area Office had been coordinating with county emergency management offices in the area, and have offered to assist with resources, if needed.